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## Argentina

## Blueberries

## Voluntary

## 2005

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**Report Highlights:**

Argentine blueberry production has increased over the last three years with planted area up to 400 percent. Given almost no domestic consumption, exports to the U.S. for MY 2004 are expected to double compared with MY 2003 to 1,000 MT.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
Buenos Aires [AR1]  
[AR]

Table of Contents

Section I. Situation and Outlook.....3  
Production .....3  
Trade.....3

## Section I. Situation and Outlook

### Production

Argentine blueberry production has thrived in three different regions: the province of Entre Rios in Northeastern Argentina, the province of Buenos Aires, near the country's capital city Buenos Aires, and the southern Patagonian valleys.

The marketing year (MY) for blueberries begins in September and ends in February. Blueberries as a commercial crop are new in Argentina. Planted area increased in the past three years from 400 hectares in MY 2001 to 1,600 hectares estimated for MY 2004. Production increased from 330 metric tons (MT) in MY 2001 to 800 MT in MY 2003 and 1,500 MT in MY 2004. Total potential production is estimated at 8,000 MT.

Domestic consumption is almost nil, which is why nearly 100 percent of the crop is exported to the Northern Hemisphere in the off-season, from October through December. Argentina's main competitor is South Africa. However year after year, Argentina has gained more market share. It is estimated that between October and November, MY 2004 export volume represents 50 percent of the total South African blueberries exports.

Since blueberries represent a new crop for Argentina, farmers have had to learn by doing, and some have become experts. Plantations are laid out with the most modern technology available. Drip irrigation, anti-frost and hail control measures and constant monitoring to combat any likely disease make this crop very labor- and capital intensive. The crop is also vulnerable to excessive rain and heat. It is believed that the plantations may be profitable for 10 years. Production potentially could start one and a half years after the initial planting but this could weaken the plant due to the lack of sufficient vegetative material. To prevent that, buds must be removed during the first two years in order to favor vegetative growth over blossoms. Sources in the industry assert that in the Entre Rios producing region, production may begin in the second year but in other regions an additional year is needed.

Hives are located on the field at a rate of six per hectare since honeybees are responsible for 80 percent of the pollenization of the blueberry flowers. According to specialists, honeybees do not like blueberries flowers; therefore they are forced to visit its flowers by isolating them from other sources of nectar. This is another reason why plantations include more than one variety, with maturity at different stages, so that bees have more time to get used to these flowers.

The main varieties planted in Argentina are the Southern Highbush ones, within which, the O'Neal variety accounts for 50-60 percent of the total production. This is an early variety that begins its production in October in the province of Entre Rios. Other less important varieties are Gulf Coast, Rabbit, and Misty.

Since blueberries are a new crop, diseases are just starting to become a problem for farmers. Rusts and soil fungi such as damping are being controlled by sprays to keep the phytosanitary standards of this crop as high as international requirements.

### Trade

Argentine blueberries are mainly exported to the U.S. (68 percent) and the European Union (30 percent). Other minor markets are Canada and Japan. In MY 2004, 1,000 MT of blueberries were exported to the U.S. Nine exporting companies were in business including two cooperatives in 2004. Also, two U.S. companies, Sunny Valley and North Bay, operate in Argentina. In 2001 export volumes to the U.S. were at 280 MT and only four exporters were involved in the business. Exports in MY 2002 and MY 2003 were 310 MT and 580 MT, respectively. There are no imports of blueberries in Argentina.